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Living

THE CONVICTION OF MARIE SALVATI FOR 30 YEARS, THE SALVATIS WERE KEPT APART. FAITH AND LOVE SAW THE FAMILY THROUGH A PRISON ORDEAL.

Bella English, Globe Staff

They met on Revere Beach. "It was the white bathing suit, one-piece, with a red lobster on it, that got my attention," Joe Salvati recalls.

"Actually, it was two-piece," corrects his wife, Marie.

"One-piece," counters Joe. "And your mother watched me like a hawk."

One- or two-piece, the day of the swimsuit was the beginning of a romance between Marie Moschella, 16, and Joseph Salvati, 18, one that has spanned half a century. Three years after meeting, they married; a year after that, their first baby, a daughter, was born. While Joe settled into a job driving a truck for a meat-packing company, Marie assumed the role of a traditional Italian housewife: four children in parochial school; big family dinners on Sunday with ravioli, meatballs, and sauce; coffee with friends in the North End where they lived; weekend dances at the community center.

"I was a young girl very much in love," Marie says. "Life was great, it was beautiful."

No one - not their families or friends, least of all not Joe or Marie Salvati - envisioned that a third party would cleave that idyllic picture in half. It wasn't another woman. It was, in some ways, worse.

On Oct. 25, 1967, as Marie walked to school to fetch the kids, she heard the buzz on the street: Her husband had been picked up by police for the murder of Teddy Deegan, a small-time hoodlum from Chelsea.

"I could not believe it," says Marie in her North End apartment as she recalls the moment, fiddling nervously with the amber reading glasses she holds in her hands. "My legs turned to jelly. I tried to stay calm. I had the kids. But I was shocked. I was devastated. Our whole lives changed overnight."

She was 32 when her husband went off to prison; he would not return for 30

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years. He missed his children growing up. The birthday parties. The first communions. The confirmations. The high school graduations. The weddings. The births of grandchildren. His father died, his mother developed Alzheimer's disease. And his wife went from a young mother to a great-grandmother.

"There was always a void, always an emptiness," says Marie. She is 66 now, and although the years robbed her of her husband, they have been kind in other ways. Her once-coppery hair has faded to auburn, her wrinkles - well-earned - are soft, and her smile, when it comes, dazzling. The tears come, too, mostly when she speaks of her children and what they missed.

"I want to tell you, when that verdict comes in, you go into a state of shock. I told the kids that Daddy had nothing to do with this. I told them we needed to go see him and support him. I told them that the truth would come out."

The truth did come out - but not until Jan. 31 this year. And though it meant that Joe Salvati had been officially exonerated - and not just paroled, as he had been in 1997 - it was a bittersweet pill to swallow. **FBI** documents revealed that the agency knowingly sent four innocent men to prison to protect the star witness against them, mob hitman Joseph "The Animal" Barboza, who was an **FBI** informant. Two of the men died in prison; Salvati and Peter Limone of Medford were recently exonerated.

Joe Salvati had a prior arrest, in 1956, for breaking and entering. He made one other mistake, a critical one: He borrowed money from Barboza, a loan shark. Little by little, he was repaying the \$400 with interest. But Barboza wanted it all, at once, and when he didn't get it, Salvati's name appeared on the list of suspects in the **Deegan** **murder** that Barboza handed to the **FBI**.

Ironically, **FBI** documents also reveal that it was Barboza, along with Vincent Flemmi and other mobsters, who planned and executed the **murder**. Barboza went into the federal witness-protection program. He was shot to death in California in 1976. Flemmi died in the 1970s while in prison on another charge.

Victor Garo of Medford has represented the Salvati family for 25 years, pro bono. ("I didn't know it would take this long," he jokes.) "What this woman went through," he says, speaking of Marie. "She is one of my heroes, and I don't have many." For years, Channel 4 reporter Dan Rea also championed Salvati's innocence, locating key witnesses and airing story after story.

Garo is now preparing a civil suit against the **FBI** on behalf of the family. "They have gone through a lot," he says. "There's still a lot of pain here. It's the story of an innocent man being convicted."

It is also the story of an innocent woman who, in a way, served her own long sentence. "I raised the kids, and somehow the years passed," is the way Marie calmly describes those decades. Her daughters - Maria, Sharon, Gail - were 11, 9, and 7, and her son, Anthony, was 4, when their father went away; they are now 46, 44, 42, and 39. There are seven grandchildren and a great-grandson. Their pictures are arrayed throughout the one-bedroom apartment that Marie moved into on the edge of the North End, once the children grew up. A month after he was released, Joe Salvati was in the delivery room when grandson Michael was born. "I cut the umbilical cord," he says, beaming.

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In traditional Italian neighborhoods, family is everything, with the man at the head. "He was always a good father, a good husband, a good provider for us," says Marie, who uses the past tense though her husband is nearby at the dining room table, sipping coffee.

If Joe wasn't home from work on time, the entire family would wait to eat supper. Sunday noon dinners were reserved for the extended family; they still are. But now, instead of Marie cooking the gravy, as she did for 30 years, Joe does. He enjoys it; it beats the hell out of working in the prison canteen.

The other prisoner

The first time she visited her husband at Walpole was the first time Marie Salvati had ever seen a prison. She quickly learned the ropes: the metal detectors, the body searches, the assigned seats, which guards were friendly, which would cut your visits short. It was a world unlike any she, a sheltered Catholic school girl, had ever encountered.

Then there was the practical problem of getting there. Marie did not have a driver's license, did not own a car, and MCI-Walpole was a world away from the North End. At first, her brother or her best friend would drive her. Then she began taking the train to Park Street and catching a Greyhound bus. She and the kids would leave at 7 a.m. in order to be at the prison by 9.

That went on for a few years, until Marie decided to renew her long-expired license. She and her mother would take practice runs, with Marie squeezing the steering wheel in a death grip, a nervous rash splotching her neck. "Ma, I don't know if I can do this," she'd wail.

"Marie, if you give up now, you'll never drive again," coaxed her mother.

Finally, she got her license and a used car. She'd listen daily to the weather report. Visiting a loved one in prison is nothing like visiting a loved one in the hospital. You can take nothing in with you, not even a purse. You sit where you are told. Hand-holding is prohibited. You are bodily searched, patted down. "They'd run their hands under your bra straps and your panty line," Marie says, grimacing. Later, when the grandchildren came along, guards would search the babies' diapers, open the cans of formula.

You can just imagine how tough it was on her. She is a private person. Her apartment is immaculate; even with the grandchildren, she manages to keep her white furniture pristine.

When Joe first went away, Marie withdrew into her apartment. "I felt the business of the home stayed at home," she says. But she soon discovered that the community supported her; they thought Joe had gotten a raw deal, too.

What pulled her through most of all was her children. "The children," she sighs. "God bless them. They did well."

Once in a while, though, one of them would come home in tears over a classmate's taunts. "I'd say, 'Honey, we know what's true. We know your dad is a good man.' " Her belief in Joe is as rock-bottom as her religion. "I always believed he was

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innocent," she says firmly, offended that you'd even ask. "I wouldn't be here if I didn't."

During prison visits, the talk centered around family. "I'd want to run the week by him, to tell him about the children. I always wanted to just give him the good stuff," she says.

Her husband obviously felt the same way. In 30 years, he never once brought up what prison life was like. "You know how men are. He just felt that was stuff I didn't need to know," she says. It was an unspoken pact: He'd take care of himself on the inside, she'd take care of "the outside."

Taking care of the outside meant going to work, which meant going back to school. A high school graduate, Marie began taking classes at community colleges, Wheelock and Boston University, eventually earning a certificate in human services. A new program had opened in the North End called Head Start. It took children at-risk and gave them intensive services. Marie was hired as a caseworker in 1970. But her salary wasn't enough to support four children, so for several years, she did seasonal income tax work at night.

Social work, though, was her love. "I felt I had an open heart and open mind to people," she says. "Joe's experience gave me the compassion." Five months ago, she retired as director of the North End Head Start. She loves running into former clients, now adults, who still call her "Miss Marie."

'I miss you so much'

Life looked up for a while in the 1980s, when Joe got furloughs - "the first lifer to get them," Marie says proudly. He was allowed 12 days a year, so he came home one day a month. "That was a great thing for our relationship and the nurturing of our family," Marie says.

Then came Governor Michael Dukakis's 1988 presidential race, and the controversy over Willie Horton, a convicted murderer who assaulted a Maryland couple while out on furlough. Just as Joe was preparing to come home for his son Anthony's high school graduation, all furloughs for lifers were revoked. It was a crushing disappointment for the family.

For Marie Salvati, the decades passed in a jumble of kids, work, grandkids, and prison visits. When Joe was in minimum security, she'd prepare his favorite pasta and eggplant dishes, and have a "picnic lunch" with him - in the visitors' room. Every week, Joe would send her a card with a sentimental greeting and a handwritten note: "I'll love you forever," or "I miss you so much." Marie would put the card on top of the TV. When a new card arrived, she'd take the old one and put it in a shoebox. Recently, pulling piles of cards bound with rubber bands from a closet, she says: "I felt like my life was packed in a shoe box."

Marie was nearly 60 years old, Joe in prison for 27 years, when her car broke down on the highway en route to see him. She promptly gave up driving. For the next three years, she took a cab to South Station, then a train to Norfolk where Joe had been transferred, then another cab to the prison. If the cab wasn't waiting for her, she'd walk the mile and a half. "You know what?" she says. "I met some nice people on that train. I met a woman whose daughter was in a state school

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for 40 years. Other people have their stories, too."

The Salvati children prefer not to share their stories with a reporter. They call their parents almost every day, and Anthony often stops by for coffee. Sunday dinners are a crowded affair. "Those kids felt hurt," says Marie's friend Mary Fiumara, who lives across the street. "It was tough on them growing up, but they were good children. That whole family believed he was innocent, and he was."

Joseph Salvati entered jail a young, dark-haired man of 34. When he walked out four years ago after Governor William Weld commuted his sentence, his hair was white, his gait slowed. He was placed on parole, so an officer came by weekly, then monthly, to check on him. He still had a criminal record. He could not leave the state.

All that changed when the Suffolk County DA's office dropped all the charges against him and a judge vacated his sentence. Jan. 31, 2001 was his first full day of freedom since Oct. 25, 1967. He'd missed the counter-culture of the '60s, the recession of the '70s, the greed decade that was the '80s, and the new economy of the '90s. But most of all, he missed his family.

"They broke the mold when they made her," he says, watching Marie move around the small galley kitchen, placing some Italian cookies on a china platter. "Who would stay with you for 30 years in prison and raise the children and do what she's done?"

Today, it's the little things the couple enjoy: coffee together in the morning, a walk down Hanover Street in the evening, baby-sitting the grandchildren. "We always kiss when we leave, and we don't go to bed angry," says Marie. "We try to pick our battles. It's normal married life."

But it wasn't easy at first. Marie and Joe, married 44 years when he came home, had to get to know each other again. "We both needed to make our adjustments," says Marie. "But you know what? The past two years have been perfect."

The last argument they had? She thinks a moment. "Over where we wanted to go eat."

Reflecting over those years without Joe, raising children alone, working to put food on the table, her eyes mist over. "You do what you gotta do" is her mantra, one that she often repeats. She is obviously proud that she raised four "good kids," had a career she loved and a husband who has come home. She remains angry at what the government, her government, did to her family. But she is not bitter. She prefers to cast her gaze ahead - not backward. "I think life is beautiful," she says. "I just pray to God that we have health and we can enjoy the rest of our lives with our family."

Later this month, Joe and Marie Salvati are going to Aruba. At ages 68 and 66, it is the first trip out of state they have taken since 1967, when the whole family went to Maine. It will, says Marie, be their second honeymoon.

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Caption: 1. SALVATI FAMILY PHOTO/ 1967: From left, Maria, Sharon, Gail, and

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Anthony Salvati shortly before their father was imprisoned. 2. GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/DAVID L. RYAN/ 1997: Joseph Salvati's wife, Marie (right), and children Sharon and Anthony at a January hearing. 3. GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM LANDERS/ 1997: Joseph Salvati (center), with Marie at his side, is all smiles after his March release from prison. 4. GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/SUZANNE KREITER/ 2001: "I raised the kids, and somehow the years passed," Marie Salvati says of the years Joseph was jailed. "There was always a void." 5. GLOBE STAFF FILE PHOTO (LEFT)/ TED DULLY; GLOBE STAFF PHOTO (ABOVE)/ SUZANNE KREITER/ "Life was great, it was beautiful," when Marie Moschella and Joseph Salvati married (top left). But his arrest (photo at left) 30 years ago shocked the family. Then the Salvatis were reunited when he was paroled, and he has since been exonerated.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

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Sunday, April 22, 2001

Magazine

ANSWERED PRAYERS OLLY LIMONE KNEW HER HUSBAND HAD BEEN WRONGLY CONVICTED, BUT SHE HAD TO WAIT 33 YEARS FOR PROOF.

MARIANNE JACOBBI

Marianne Jacobbi is a freelance writer who lives in Belmont. Her last article for the magazine was on the Martha Moxley murder case.

The sound of her husband's snoring as he naps on the living room couch is music to Olympia Limone's ears. "We never heard snoring before," she says. "I'll be sitting in the kitchen with my daughter now, and all of a sudden we'll hear snoring. And my daughter looks at me and says, 'Can you believe that he's here?'"

For the past 33 years, Peter Limone hadn't been there. He was in prison, convicted of a murder he always swore he didn't commit. And after spending most of her married life apart from the man she loves, Olly Limone doesn't mind his snoring at all. It's like a lullaby.

The couple are sitting in their Medford home, a tidy three-bedroom house they bought when they were first married. It's filled with furniture that 66-year-old Peter Limone made in prison - a handsome secretary, a china closet, bookcases, an entire suite in the master bedroom, all in dark-stained walnut. You might think the pieces would be tainted by their unhappy origins, but Olly Limone, 64, shows them off proudly. And you might expect the wear and tear of half a life in prison to show on a man's face, but Peter Limone's smile is so radiant, his brown eyes so clear and bright, it's hard to believe he was locked up all those years. Laughter fills Olly's voice as her eyes meet her husband's across the dining room table.

Olly Limone says she was certain her husband would be found not guilty at his 1968 trial. As she waited for the verdict, she was sure he had not been a party to the murder he and five codefendants were charged with. So when the jury in Suffolk Superior Court found Peter Limone guilty as an accessory before the fact, for ordering the killing, she was stunned. But worse was yet to come, at the sentencing hearing: "When I heard what the judge said," she remembers, "I passed out in the courtroom." Her husband had been sentenced to die in the electric chair at the state's maximum-security prison in Walpole.

Olly and Peter Limone's four children were between 1 and 7 years old at the time. "I was scared to death," says Olly. "All I did was cry and cry and cry. My eyes were slits from crying. I really thought that he was going to be found not

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guilty. So it was shocking enough that he was found guilty, but the death sentence!"

PETER LIMONE'S NAME FIRST APPEARED IN THE HEADLINES after the murder of Edward Deegan, a small-time criminal shot five times in an alley in Chelsea in 1965. Deegan, a former boxer with a police record, was one of 49 men to die in a series of Massachusetts gangland murders that began in early 1964. Reports linked Peter Limone with organized crime and Boston's mob, and Boston was cracking down on organized crime. Thirty-one-year-old Peter Limone looked like a logical target.

Born in Boston's West End, one of 15 children, Limone had quit school after the sixth grade to sell produce from a pushcart to help support the family. By the 1960s, he was managing a lounge in downtown Boston. He had a gambling conviction, and he didn't deny he had friendships and connections with some dubious characters, including Gennaro J. Angiulo, the Boston mob boss. What Limone vehemently denied - on the day he turned himself in to authorities in 1967, throughout his 49-day trial, and for all the years he was in prison - was that he killed Deegan.

That was little comfort to Olly. "The hardest was the beginning," she says - the four years her husband spent on death row in solitary confinement. She was allowed just two visits a week, an hour each time. "I was scared to drive up there by myself," she says. "I would go up with his brother James. It was awful. You had to go through this big long hall, escorted by a guard. There were inmates walking around, and there were all these cages. That's where we visited - through a cage." Through the mesh screen, it was impossible to touch hands. Their visits took place in the prison block, not the visiting room, and they didn't want to subject their young children to that long walk down the corridor, with other inmates all around. Eventually, the prison superintendent allowed the children to see their father in the main visiting room, where the other inmates saw their families.

During the death row visits, Olly Limone recalls, her husband was always smiling. "He would never let me see him any other way, because then I would really, really be upset," she says. He told her he was reading, painting by number, to stay sane. They talked about the children, Peter Jr., Paul, Carolyn, and baby Janine. They talked about the small things. Olly was a talented seamstress and had begun taking in sewing, making curtains and doing alterations for friends and neighbors, to keep the family off welfare. They would talk about their hopes, for an appeal, a new trial. "How long could they possibly keep him?" Olly asked herself. "He'll get out on appeal." She believed in his innocence, and she was full of confidence. But that was just in the beginning.

Peter Limone wrote letters home almost every day. "They were all letters of encouragement," says Olly, "to try and tell me that he's not going to be staying there long, and once the appeals go through he'd be home. He never believed that, but he wanted me to believe it."

Life was hard for the children, too. "The boys had to deal with the kids in school saying that their father was a murderer," says Olly. "And they did feel terrible about it." One by one, when they were old enough to understand, she says, Peter gave each of his children the same talk: "Just remember one thing - what they accused me of I'm innocent of. I'm telling you that, and I never lied to

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you."

In 1972 the death penalty was abolished in Massachusetts, and Peter Limone's sentence was amended to life without parole. He was transferred to the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Norfolk, a medium-security prison where the conditions were better, and his life improved considerably. He was even allowed furloughs, visits home, 14 days a year, for no more than two days at a time. He had 160 such visits over the next dozen years.

The family was hopeful when he went before the parole board in 1983 to ask that his murder sentence be commuted. Guards and prison officials agreed that he was a model prisoner. Eager to learn a trade, he had taught himself carpentry and cabinetmaking, and soon he was skilled enough to be producing the knockoffs of Ethan Allen furniture that now fill his home.

He even had a letter of appreciation from Governor Michael Dukakis, sent in 1975 after a fellow inmate at Norfolk had shot two guards; Peter Limone had helped disarm the shooter and persuaded him to surrender. The parole board voted 5-2 in his favor, but Dukakis turned him down.

"They had him marked as organized crime," says Olly. "And any time you're marked that, you can almost be guaranteed you're going to get turned down, regardless of what evidence you have."

The furloughs were making life bearable for the family, though. Peter Limone went home once a month, on birthdays, holidays, Easter, and Thanksgiving. He was there for his son Peter's wedding in 1986, Carolyn's wedding in 1987. "He used to make us leave two hours ahead of time when he had to go back, because he was so afraid of being late," says Olly. But the visits home ended in 1987, when furloughs were discontinued for lifers convicted of first- or second-degree murder. Carolyn's wedding was Peter Limone's last time out.

In the years that followed, he was sent to prisons across the state - Walpole, Norfolk, Concord, Shirley, Old Colony, and Bridgewater. He was even transferred briefly to a prison in Oregon, following a breakup at Walpole after which several inmates were sent to out-of-state facilities.

"I would just get used to one place," says Olly, "and they'd move him again."

He went before the parole board a second and final time, in 1988, but was denied again. All attempts at an appeal failed as well. "After a while, we had no lawyer," says Olly, "because first of all, we had no money. And what was the sense of having a lawyer? There was nothing new."

"I had given up hope that he was ever going to come out," says Olly. "In my mind, it was, 'He's going to be carried out of there in a box.' But she went to visit every week. "He was still going to be my husband until the day I died, or he died, whichever came first. I never even gave a thought to leaving him, because I didn't believe that he was guilty."

Middle age set in for both the Limones. Peter suffered a heart attack in 1986 and was treated with an angioplasty. Olly developed a bad back. She turned more and more to her Catholic faith for support. "I started going to church every day,"

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she says, "instead of just on Sunday." And she still faithfully visited whichever prison her husband was in. At the Boston Pre-Release Center in Dorchester, she was allowed to bring him food. "We would eat together, and then we would sit and play gin rummy."

But she always hated visiting prisons, Olly says. "I never ever got used to it. I felt degraded all the time. When the babies were born, the little ones, the grandchildren, they had to take their diaper off to let the guard search their diaper. It was just so humiliating and degrading. I wasn't brought up in an atmosphere like that. I thought, I can't believe I'm visiting jails."

Peter Limone was incarcerated at the Bay State Correctional Center, a minimum-security prison in Norfolk, in 1998 when lawyer John Cavicchi went to see him. Limone was 63, and his efforts to win an appeal had failed. He no longer expected a rescuer. And Cavicchi had failed once already: He had fought for nearly 20 years to clear one of Limone's codefendants, Louis Greco, in the **Deegan murder**, to no avail. Greco had died in prison in 1995. But Cavicchi knew the Limone case inside and out and was eager to represent Peter.

The Limones had no money; Cavicchi told them he wanted the case, not money.

As Cavicchi gathered evidence for a new trial, key pieces fell into place. One was an affidavit signed by Joseph Barboza, a hit man also known as "The Animal," who had admitted to killing 20 people. He had turned government informant, and he was the prosecution's star witness at Limone's 1968 trial. But after Limone went to prison, Barboza admitted publicly that he had lied in his testimony at the trial; he knew Limone had nothing to do with the murder.

More shocking were the documents long hidden at **FBI** headquarters in Washington, which were discovered by a Justice Department task force and released last December. The documents appear to suggest that **FBI** agents not only knew that Limone and his codefendants were innocent but also knew of the **Deegan murder** plot two days before it happened and did nothing to stop the killing. They knew who had done it and that Peter Limone was not involved. Yet they did nothing to help him, apparently so they could protect their own informants.

That's the part Olly is bitter about. "Those people that put him there," says Olly Limone, "I want to see them go to jail. I'm a forgiving person but not that forgiving. I'd be happy for them to go to jail, to spend whatever few years they have, just to see how they like it."

On January 5, Peter Limone appeared before Judge Margaret R. Hinkle of Middlesex Superior Court, his ankles in shackles but his hopes high that he might, this time, have a chance at a new trial. Instead, Hinkle vacated his conviction and set Peter Limone free without bail. "It is now time to move on," she told the courtroom filled with his relatives and friends. She criticized the **FBI** for withholding information that could have led to an acquittal. "Mr. Limone's long wait is over," she declared.

After 33 years, two months, and five days, Peter Limone returned home for good. He didn't want a big welcome home party, he said. What he wanted was to be surrounded by his four children - now in their 30s and 40s - and his eight grandchildren, who range from 3 to 11 years old. He wanted his brothers and

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sisters, his in-laws, his other relatives. Cavicchi was there, too, and the superintendent of one of the prisons where Peter Limone had been locked up. Everyone ate pasta and Italian chocolates, and Peter Limone opened a 30-year-old bottle of Scotch that he had given one of his sisters before he went to prison. They had pledged to drink it together when he came home.

Peter Limone doesn't talk much about the suffering of the past 33 years, the days in a 5-by-10-foot cell, the solitary confinement in the early years. "It was very, very hard" is all he will say. "You could never describe it." What kept him going, he says, are "my wife, my children, and a strong family."

"You know, you're in jail 33 years," he says, "and I used to see a lot of guys come in, married two or three years, their wives get divorced. You know it's hard on a woman. And I used to say to myself, I gotta be thankful for a wonderful family. I have a wonderful wife; she's staying with me. People used to be amazed. I've talked to correctional officers, inmates. 'Geez, your wife's still with you?' 'Yes, she is.' You know, it's like a proud moment."

His first Sunday of freedom, Peter Limone attended Mass with his wife at their church in Medford, St. Francis of Assisi. "Everybody was waiting outside to meet him, all my friends," Olly Limone says. "Of course, I had all new friends, over so many years, and he never met them. He was like a celebrity."

Settling into life on the outside, Limone is getting used to being a husband again, a father again. He and Olly are like a born-again couple. They talk in tandem, not sure whose turn it is to speak. "When he first got out," says Olly, "he used to look at the time and forget for a minute and see if it was count time." Peter explains: "We had count time" - the prison head count - "at 7 in the morning, 11:30, 5 o'clock, and 9:30 at night." He's enjoying learning how not to watch the clock. He has his driver's license and the freedom to walk around town and up to Medford Square.

This year, he was home for the Super Bowl. "That's the first one" he ever watched at home with his kids.

"I sat down with my two sons and watched the football game." After the game, there was a party for Lia, a granddaughter celebrating her seventh birthday. "That's the first birthday party I attended with my grandchildren," Peter Limone says.

The case against Peter Limone was officially dropped on January 30. Many of the people involved in the case are now dead. Barboza, the hit man who lied in court, was shot to death in San Francisco in 1976. Three of Limone's codefendants died in prison. One was released in 1997, and another, who admitted a role in the shooting, is serving a life sentence. Peter Limone isn't interested in talking about a civil lawsuit and damages, although Cavicchi and a new team of lawyers are working on a case against the government that's likely to be a multimillion-dollar suit. "Deep inside I'm very angry," says Peter Limone. "They took half my life. What can they give you for 33 years?"

Olly is certain her husband wouldn't be with her today had the death penalty not been abolished. "They don't keep you for 33 years on death row," she says. "He positively would have been executed."

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Seven-year-old Julie comes into the room, here for a visit and bursting with happiness to be in the presence of both her grandparents, Nonna and Papa. She wraps her arms tight around her Nonna. Julie and her sister Rachelle, now 11, visited often when their Papa was away. Olly always assumed the little girls knew that Papa lived in prison, though the word was never spoken. "I mean, we were going through all kinds of doors, metal detectors, everything," says Olly Limone. But it wasn't till last December, when Julie heard the story on TV, that she realized. "They said on the TV he's been in prison for 33 years," says Olly, "and she looked at us and said, 'Papa's in prison?' And she just burst into tears."

Peter recalls that at Julie's last visit with him behind bars, on Christmas Eve, she told him: "I don't want nothing from Santa Claus, Papa. I don't want no presents - nothing. I just want you to come home."

With all the grandchildren living nearby, and the countless First Communions, confirmations, dance recitals, graduations, soccer and hockey games to come, Peter Limone has much to look forward to. He missed so many of his own children's milestones, he's not about to miss any more. There's his younger daughter Janine's wedding coming up, and he's going to walk her down the aisle. There are dinners at Antonio's, his son's restaurant in Boston. There are evenings at home with Olly, watching TV. But one show will never be turned on: The Sopranos.

"He hates it with a passion," says Olly. "He won't watch it, because he feels that they are insulting the Italian people. He has absolutely no use for it."

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Caption: Peter and Olly Limone together again in the Medford home they bought when they were first married.

---- INDEX REFERENCES -----

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Monday, April 23, 2001

NEWS

Mob victims' kin wants to talk - Bennett: Feds have to police the police

J.M. Lawrence

Three decades since the Bennett brothers were allegedly murdered by the Bulger gang, the men's sons want a chance to tell Congress how the Boston FBI's cozy relationship with gangsters led to the destruction of a family.

"I want to tell them they need to police the police better," said Billy Bennett, an Orlando steelworker who hopes to speak during upcoming hearings held by the U.S. House of Representative's Committee on Government Reform.

Led by Indiana Rep. Dan Burton, the committee has scheduled a May 3 hearing to probe Boston's handling of the 1965 murder of Edward "Teddy" Deegan and whether the FBI knowingly sent four innocent men to prison for decades.

The committee plans other hearings on the Boston FBI and the Mob but no other dates are scheduled yet.

The three Bennett brothers were murdered in 1967. Edward "Wimpy" Bennett disappeared first. Then Walter Bennett disappeared and William Bennett was found in a snow bank shot in the chest in Dorchester after they vowed to avenge "Wimpy." Sources said the murders were a result of an underworld turf war.

Stephen Flemmi - known as "The Rifleman" from his days as a soldier during the Korean War - is now slated to stand trial May 21 on the Bennett murders, part of a wide-ranging racketeering indictment. Flemmi has been charged with 10 murders and three counts of conspiracy to murder with James "Whitey" Bulger.

The Bennett family contends FBI agents covered up the murders to protect Flemmi, now 66, who was an informant.

Flemmi's brother, Vincent "The Bear" Flemmi, also was an informant for FBI agents who protected him from prosecution in the Deegan killing, according to documents uncovered in a Department of Justice probe.

At the Government Reform hearing, Joseph Salvatti will testify about the 30 years he spent in prison for the Deegan murder before his exoneration earlier this

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year.

"They ruined a lot of lives. Not just our family's," said Billy Bennett, who was 17 when his father was killed.

His cousins also would like the family to have a voice during the hearings. Their fathers' bodies have never been found.

Bennett remembers seeing FBI agent H. Paul Rico confront his father two weeks before he was shot. Rico wanted records kept by the two dead uncles - Walter and Edward - who were bookmakers in Dorchester, Billy said.

"If they took these people off the streets when my uncles disappeared, my father would have lived," Bennett said.

Sources in the Government Reform Committee said a witness list is still being compiled.

"We're talking to as many people as we can right now," the source said. "Everybody's fixated on Whitey Bulger and Steve Flemmi and you can lose sight of the beginning of the story."

Gang leader Bulger is still one of the FBI's Most Wanted fugitives with a \$1 million bounty on his head.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

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